



Making agile working an opportunity, not a challenge

By Ian Robertson

The pandemic has radically altered the way we work. New, experimental ways of working are everywhere. Agile (or flexible) working has accelerated - but it's not for everyone.

Some staff find it challenging to work from home. They have asked companies to provide them with a safe office environment whilst we struggle with the challenges of Covid-19.

Together from a distance

How do you keep geographically dispersed staff connected and performing? That is the challenge. How do you drive innovation and collaboration from a distance?

Those who can are working from home. But we know large numbers of staff want an office option – whether full time or a few days a week.

Making hybrid arrangements work

The combination of home and office working is set to stay in some form or another. And it brings both opportunities and drawbacks.

Organisations must look ahead – up to five years – and consider what the world of work might look like for them. Whilst offices might not be in use now, it would be foolish to assume that is a certainty for the future and close them down.

Effective agile working needs the right talent too. In fact, your recruitment strategies might need a rethink. Do you recruit on technical ability and qualifications, or do you search for the right attitude and work skills to embrace an agile way of life?

When deciding on the best route for *your* organisation, consider these pros and cons of home-based working:

Pro's

- You can adapt to less office-based work
- Employees work where *and when* they perform best
- Employees feel more autonomous
- Their well-being, happiness, and job satisfaction can improve
- Your operating costs fall due to better space management
- Staff can be more innovative

Con's

- Collaboration and creativity can be more effective in person, instead of video calls
- Your staff culture can be negatively impacted
- Staff develop skills better when they work in a team
- Maintaining full collaboration can be difficult from a distance
- Team cohesion may suffer

Flexing time and space

Changing the work location, or the time-of-day staff work, offers flexibility to your organisation and your people. You could even rent shared workspaces, to complement working at home. And being more flexible on *when* they work helps many different people with lives to balance.

Of course, traditional models, such as shift work, might be impossible to flex. Some staff will always have time restrictions to respect.

All this has a wider impact on the community too. How do city cafes, delis, pubs, and newsagents survive when they relied on trade from nearby office workers?

Can it work for you?

For many, agile working is here to stay. That means, you must ensure: *"The right number of people with the right skills are employed in the right place, at the right time, at the right cost, and on the right contract, to deliver short and long-term objectives."*

You must consider your changing business needs for people (workforce demand) and how those needs can be met in terms of *who* will do the work. Gaps between future workforce demand and supply present risks to your business.

That said, there is clear demand from staff for agile working. Embracing this enthusiasm by adapting your working practices could present an opportunity, not a challenge.

Ian Robertson

Executive Director

ian.robertson@emaconsultancy.org.uk